

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 305 486

CE 052 220

TITLE After the Act. Developing Basic Skills Work in the 1990s.

INSTITUTION Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, London (England).

PUB DATE 89

NOTE 17p.

PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Adult Basic Education; *Basic Skills; *Educational Change; *Educational Legislation; Educational Needs; English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; Postsecondary Education

IDENTIFIERS *Education Reform Act 1988 (England); England; Wales

ABSTRACT

This booklet is concerned with how basic skills work with young people and adults can be maintained and developed in the next few years in light of Great Britain's Education Reform Act. An introduction provides a brief overview of the content of the act. Section 2 highlights the basic skills needs in England and Wales. In Section 3, current basic skills provision in England and Wales is described; discussion focuses on diversity, providers, and change in the pattern of basic skills provision. Section 4 addresses English for speakers of other languages. It reports that current provision in England and Wales is extremely patchy and the lack of coherence among providers is confusing to both providers and potential students. Section 5 provides an overview of the Education Reform Act. It addresses these aspects of the act: mandate for a strategic plan for the local education authorities (LEAs), adequacy of further education provision, needs analysis, essential features of an adequate basic skills service, adequacy of basic skills provision for individuals with learning difficulties, classification of subject areas, weightings for full-time equivalents, budgets, excepted items, development funds, specific grants, program area weightings, policy guidance, governing bodies, and school premises. Section 6 summarizes the roles of the LEAs and the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit since passage of the act. (YLB)

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AFTER THE ACT

Developing Basic Skills Work in the 1990s

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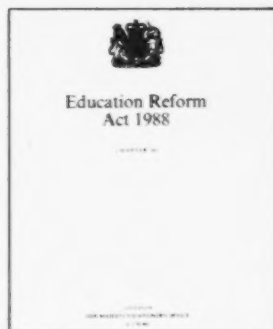


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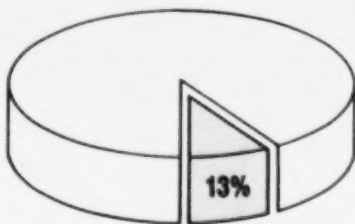
1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Education Reform Act received the Royal Assent on 29th July 1988. In the main, it is concerned with the organisation and governance of schools, colleges of further education and higher education as well as the establishment of a framework for strategic planning and financial delegation. The Act also establishes a national curriculum for schools including the setting of attainment targets and arrangements for the assessment of school pupils. Whilst most of the Act is not specifically concerned with basic skills provision for adults (including English for speakers of other language – ESOL), it does provide an opportunity to improve the coherence of and strengthen existing provision, particularly through better strategic planning and co-ordination.
- 1.2 **'After the Act'** is not intended to provide guidance on all of the implications of the Education Reform Act for Local Education Authorities (LEAs), colleges of further education and other involved or interested in basic skills work with adults. Nor is it intended to offer general advice on the provision of further education, including the education of adults. Circulars issued by the Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office Education Department provide guidance on the implications of the Act, and other central agencies, such as the Further Education Unit (FEU) and the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education (UDACE) are better placed to offer this general advice. Rather **'After the Act'** is concerned with how basic skills work with young people and adults can be maintained and developed in the next few years, in the light of the Education Reform Act.



2. Basic Skills Needs in England and Wales

- 2.1 Evidence from the National Child Development Study (NCDS) about the self admitted literacy and numeracy difficulties of 23 year old adults was first published by ALBSU in 1983 and this remains the best estimate of the scale of need. The NCDS survey indicated that just over 13% of all

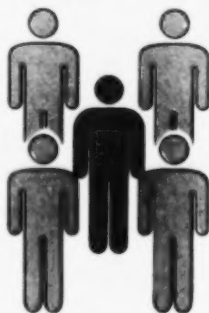


Just over 13% of all 23 year olds felt they had some problems with reading, writing or basic mathematics.

23 year olds felt that they had some problems with reading, writing or basic mathematics. If 23 year olds are no better or no worse than other young people and adults (and there is no really reliable evidence either way) then almost 6 million people would appear to have significant problems with fundamental basic skills in the UK.

- 2.2 The range of problems with basic skills is quite wide and includes people who cannot read at all (an estimated 400,000 adults and young people in the UK if the NCDS data is consistent for the population as a whole), those who have some limited mastery of reading, albeit hesitant and without confidence, to those people whose writing, particularly spelling, is so poor that they avoid writing even the simplest note. About a quarter of those with problems in the NCDS survey felt that they had the greatest difficulty with number work.

- 2.3 The evidence from the NCDS research is also supported by evidence taken from the Mori poll commissioned by Granada Television's 'World in Action' programme in early 1987. For example, 44% of the adults questioned (and 52% of teenagers) could not understand a simple fire notice, 26% (and 25% of teenagers) had difficulty filling in a form correctly and 27% (29% of teenagers) could not



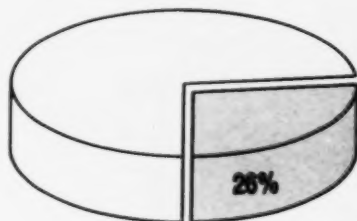
1 in 5 long term unemployed adults have substantial literacy and/or numeracy problems.

subtract £1.80 from £5.00. Furthermore, a survey conducted by the then Manpower Services Commission among long-term unemployed adults in 1987, indicated that at least one in five long term unemployed adults have substantial literacy and/or numeracy problems. Finally all of this evidence does not take full account of the need for language and literacy tuition among adults whose first language is not English.

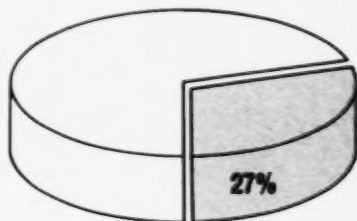
- 2.4 Research commissioned by ALBSU and the then MSC at the University of Lancaster tells us rather more about the backgrounds of these adults with self admitted literacy and numeracy problems. The results of this research indicate that adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties did not live in any one geographical area and that many had suffered from multiple disadvantages including lower family income and poor health. More men are likely to have problems with literacy than women (although numbers are likely to be about equal in respect of basic maths) and few had any recognised qualification or had received any post school education or training. Those in work tended to be in unskilled jobs and almost twice as many were unemployed as in the sample as a whole.



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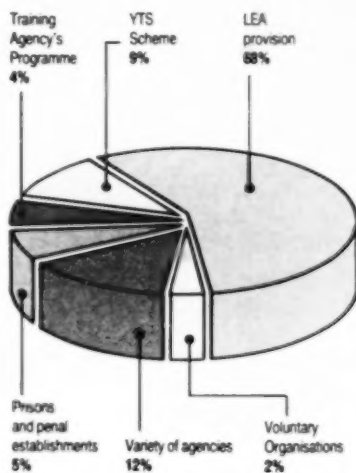


27% of adults could not subtract £1.80 from £5.00.

3. Basic Skills Provision in England and Wales

3.1 Current basic skills provision provides very much for the 'tip of the iceberg' of estimated need and in most areas of England and Wales the service available can barely cope, even where publicity and outreach work is minimal. Thus, whilst the very best LEA is providing for about 4% of the estimated number in need at any one time, the very poorest provider is only providing tuition for less than 0.05% of the estimated number of adults in need in their area. The cost in social, economic and human terms of this gap between need and available provision is staggering.

3.2 Basic skills provision is also marked by its diversity. Provision does not feature in only one sector of post school education, and although LEAs are perhaps the major providers in most areas, a wide range of other agencies and organisations are often involved. In November 1987, for example, whilst 68% of the adults and young people receiving tuition were in LEA provision, 9% were receiving basic skills tuition as part of the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), 4% as part of the Training Agency's programme for unemployed adults, 5% in prisons and other penal establishments, and 12% through a variety of other agencies such as the probation service, hospitals and adult training centres. In addition about 2% of adults and young people were being provided for by voluntary organisations. Moreover, information from LEAs tends to underestimate provision made by private training managers as part of programmes for unemployed young people and adults.



3.3 Whilst a number of different agencies and organisations are involved in making basic skills provision in most areas, often a number of

different sectors of post school education provision are involved in the opportunities provided by the LEA. Thus, whilst two thirds of LEAs in England and Wales, for example, employ a county or borough co-ordinator for basic skills, they are rarely responsible for the totality of even LEA provision. Rather, basic skills co-ordinators tend to be directly responsible for the co-ordination of basic skills work organised as part of adult or community education, whether a 'free standing' service or a department or part of a department of a college of further education. Thus, whilst a county or borough co-ordinator may be responsible for non-vocational, part-time provision for adults in an area, basic skills support in colleges of further education, vocationally related provision for young people and adults (YTS or Employment Training, for example) or specialist provision in prisons for instance, is rarely co-ordinated by the same person or in the same way.

- 3.4 The pattern of basic skills provision is, however, changing rapidly in many parts of England and Wales. The development of more flexible learning opportunities, including open learning, the increase in the number of basic skills workshops in colleges, and the emphasis on basic skills support as part of other education courses and training has led to more choice for potential students. There is an increased emphasis on outreach work, on targeting basic skills provision towards specific groups and specific areas and on community based approaches and these developments have increased the range of work in most areas of England and Wales. Moreover, increasingly basic skills students want progression routes to further and continuing education and vocational training.

4. English for Speakers of Other Languages

- 4.1 English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), often referred to as English as a Second Language work, is equally diverse and often even more poorly co-ordinated. At the present time there is no reliable estimate of the need for help with English by speakers of other languages who are permanently settled in the UK; the best, probably conservative, estimate is that about half a million adults need help with English language or literacy at a variety of levels. Some are not literate in any language and have had the benefit of very little formal education, others can read and write a number of other languages but have never been taught English and others are fairly fluent in English, (as well as other languages), but need some language support if they are to benefit fully from education and vocational training. Moreover, the range of language groups is very wide with, for example, over 170 different mother tongues spoken in the ILEA and 47 mother tongues spoken in Gloucestershire.
- 4.2 Current provision in England and Wales is extremely patchy. For example about 80% of the students receiving tuition in 1987 were in four of the ten regions of England and Wales and only six LEAs reported more than 1,000 ESOL students receiving tuition. However, almost 50% of LEAs have more than 100 ESOL students and demographic trends indicate that almost all LEAs will have sizeable ESOL needs in the next few years.
- 4.3 The confusion of what is included in English for speakers of other languages makes it difficult to be entirely definitive about current provision. Whilst the Training Agency and prisons provide relatively little of the total ESOL provision, much English as a Foreign Language (EFL) work in colleges of further education is concerned with language tuition for ethnic minority adults who are permanently settled in the UK, rather than with tuition for temporary residents. Thus, whilst much community based provision is part-time, largely attended by women and provided in a wide range of locations, including primary schools and health centres, colleges usually provide more substantial courses, largely attended by men and often vocationally linked. This lack of coherence is bad enough for those involved professionally in the education service; for potential students it is totally confusing.

5. The Education Reform Act 1988

- 5.1 The Education Reform Act imposes a duty on local education authorities to

"secure the provision for their area of adequate facilities for further education".

and in this context further education includes the education of adults as well as young people over compulsory school attendance age. The Act also places a requirement on an LEA to

"submit to the Secretary of State a scheme outlining the principles and procedures which the authority will use to plan its further and higher education provision."

- 5.2 Included in an LEA's scheme there will need to be a **strategic plan** for the authority's further education provision and proposals for the delegation of finance and the constitution of governing bodies for further education institutions. Circular 9/88 on 'Local Management of Further and Higher Education Colleges: Planning and Delegation Schemes and Articles of Government' provides guidance on the preparation of plans and delegation schemes as required by the Act and the revision of college articles of government. **'After the Act'** addresses, in the main, the Checklist of Items specified in this Circular (Item 1,2 and 3).

- 5.3 The inclusion in the Education Reform Act of the term 'adequate facilities for further education' inevitably means that authorities will need to determine and describe **adequacy** for different areas of further education provision. Ideally the Unit believes that 'adequate facilities' can only be determined after an in-depth analysis by the LEA of educational needs in their area. This is particularly important in respect of basic skills needs which are often unarticulated unless there has been substantial publicity and outreach work. Adults who

see themselves as educational failures are poorly placed in an education service which is often demand rather than needs led. Moreover, consultation with potential basic skills students is particularly difficult compared to consultation with more confident adults.

- 5.4 ALBSU recognises, however, that the time and cost involved in **needs analysis** makes it impossible to undertake such a task before the preparation and submission of a strategic plan for further education. It should be possible, however, for LEAs to outline the parameters of basic skills provision in the authority, set out the framework for provision within their area, including how provision is to be co-ordinated, and establish targets for basic skills provision over a given period of, say, three years.
- 5.5 In the Unit's view, an adequate basic skills service should have the following essential features irrespective of the particular area concerned:

(a) Basic skills students should be able to take advantage of a minimum of 4 hours tuition per week for 46 weeks of the year. (Clearly, some students may not wish to take advantage of this scale of provision).

(b) LEAs should provide basic skills tuition for a minimum of 5% of the estimated need in the authority's area at any one time. (The population over the age of 16 years in England and Wales represents 79.4% of the total population. Thus, some 13% of adults in an LEA or college catchment area may have problems with literacy and/or numeracy. The Unit believes that a realistic, yet modest, target, is that 5% of this total should be receiving tuition at any one time).

(c) Basic skills provision should be available free of charge to adults, irrespective of their individual means.

(d) A real choice of basic skills learning opportunities should be available for all potential students within reasonable travelling distance of where they live. (i.e. individual tuition, small groups, open learning, short courses, etc.).

(e) Students on courses in colleges of further education should be able to receive basic skills and language support as part of the course.

(f) Advice and guidance about further learning opportunities should be available for basic skills students in order that they are able to progress to other education and training opportunities in the area if they wish.

In ensuring adequacy of provision, LEAs will need to take account of the various education and training providers in their area and the opportunity provided by the Act to increase coherence. Whether LEA basic skills provision is an integral part of colleges of further education, a part of a 'free standing' adult or community education service or effectively a separate service, ALBSU believes that it will need to be included in any strategic plan proposed by LEAs.

- 5.6 In fulfilling its duty to secure adequate facilities for further education, a local education authority is required to

"have regard to the requirements of persons over compulsory school age who have learning difficulties".

A person who has a learning difficulty is described in the Act as someone who

"has significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of his age."

The DES circular 9/88 states that an LEA needs to describe the factors which it has taken into account in planning provision and suggests that the needs of people with learning difficulties should be one of those factors. ALBSU takes the view that the definition of a learning difficulty in the Act embraces most basic skills provision made by authorities. With this in mind, ALBSU intends to draw to the attention of the Secretary of State the need to consider the adequacy of the proposed basic skills provision in judging plans submitted by LEAs. (Item 5).

- 5.7 The Circular also asks LEAs to include a 'statement of **classification of subject areas** and other groupings of work to be used in allocating student numbers to colleges'. Guidance from the DES suggests that authorities may wish to add to a subject based classification 'programme areas'. In allocating student numbers to colleges the Unit believes that it is essential that basic skills, including literacy, numeracy and second language provision, is included as a specific 'programme area'. **(Item 9).**
- 5.8 Basic skills provision needs relatively low student/teacher ratios particularly as groups need to be small enough for students to receive considerable individual attention. The Unit suggests a ratio of one lecturer to every six to eight students in 'dedicated' provision (classes or courses where the primary purpose is the improvement of basic skills such as literacy and numeracy), although slightly higher ratios may be possible with groups of more advanced students. It will, however, be difficult to provide this level of service if the **weightings** used to calculate full-time equivalents fail to take account of the particular needs of basic skills work. Thus, the Unit recommends that authorities should not use the inappropriate weightings set out in Schedule 9 to the Act but, rather, adopt more appropriate weightings. (The weightings in schedule 9 were only included in the act for the purpose of determining which institutions should transfer to the PCFC sector and which should receive delegated budgets. DES Guidance suggests that they do not need to be used for any other purpose). **(Item 10).**
- 5.9 Different authorities will use different methods for determining what should be included in the total colleges' budget. For example, where an adult or community education service is organised by an LEA outside of colleges of further education, the DES Circular suggests that the costs of providing this service, and the cost of the authority's central administration and support services attributable to this service, should not be included in the colleges' budget. Thus, the funds allocated for basic skills work, included as part of this provision, would similarly not be included in the budget of colleges in this instance. Where, however, adult and community education is only provided by colleges of further education in an LEA area and basic skills work is allocated part of this budget, these sums are likely to be included in the colleges' budget. Finally, authorities may, of course, decide to include adult education centres in the planning and funding provisions of schemes.

- 5.10 ALBSU believes that, however the service is organised, basic skills provision needs to be financed through the identification of a **specific budget** rather than from an unspecified sum drawn from a more general budget. Thus, in determining the budgets of individual colleges or other institutions, including the adult education service, LEAs should specify the element included for basic skills work and indicate the scale of learning opportunities to be financed by the funds made available including the target number of students to be involved. Moreover, individual colleges should only be able to 'vire' these specific funds in exceptional circumstances and with the LEA's approval. If virement is more generally possible it is all too easy, through lack of publicity and commitment, to demonstrate that lack of demand indicates lack of need for basic skills provision. (Item 11).
- 5.11 In determining the general colleges' budget, authorities may decide that some funds should be held back by the LEA in the form of **excepted items**. However, schemes submitted by authorities will need to specify a limit on the proportion of the general colleges' budget held back for excepted items and this should not exceed 15% at the outset and should not be more than 10% after three years of operation of the scheme. Authorities may include the costs of **Administrative and Advisory Services** as an excepted item and the Unit feels that this should include the costs of a borough or county co-ordinator for basic skills and/or English for Speakers of other Languages. Basic skills provision involves a good deal of specialised advice and support, as well as regular monitoring of the quality of the provision available, and this cannot be undertaken, we believe, by a general adviser or inspector. Thus, it may be appropriate to incorporate a county or borough co-ordinator for basic skills and ESOL into the authority's advisory team and to make their services available, in an advisory capacity, to the various providers in the LEA's area.
- 5.12 DES Circular 9/88 indicates five possible methods of managing spending on **Administrative and Advisory Services** and requests authorities to provide a statement of how the costs of the specified administrative and advisory services covered by the excepted item will be handled in college budgets. ALBSU recommends that authorities adopt Option B, whereby an LEA might determine the sum that needs to be spent in the borough in respect of a basic skills and ESOL co-ordinator, as part of the authorities advisory service. This sum should be incorporated in individual college budgets as an

earmarked sum, and the LEA then requires the college to use the sum to 'buy' the service from the LEA. (Item 21).

- 5.13 Authorities are also able to hold a **development fund** to stimulate various desirable activities. The Unit believes that it is crucial for LEAs to establish a development fund and that basic skills work should be a high priority for development funding. In some cases it may be appropriate to pump-prime specific college initiatives, such as workplace basic skills programmes or access and progression for basic skills students to other education and training opportunities. In other instances it may be appropriate to use funds drawn from the development fund to meet the LEA's or college's required contribution to specific grants such as Education Support Grants, Section 11 and ALBSU Development Projects. (Item 23).
- 5.14 The Circular indicates that authorities will generally need to identify and treat as excepted items central Government and European Commission **specific grants** including Education Support Grants (ESGs), Local Education Authority Training Grants (LEATGs), Section 11, and Home Office funds for education and training in prisons, etc. The Unit confirms that Project funding agreed by ALBSU will need to be treated as an excepted item by authorities. While ALBSU Project sponsorship may fund work in a particular institution in an authority's area, such as a college of further education, ALBSU expects to continue the practice of requesting applications for sponsorship to be submitted by LEAs rather than individual institutions. Clearly an LEA may delegate its role in negotiating sponsorship to a specific institution, such as a college of further education, although formal agreement will still need to be agreed between ALBSU and the appropriate LEA. How the 25% of the estimated costs of a project which need to be met by an LEA is to be provided is, however, a matter to be determined by the LEA concerned. (Item 25).
- 5.15 LEAs are also required to detail the **programme area weightings** to be used for distributing funds on the basis of student number allocations, including any non-subject-based programmes, and to provide information on whether programme, mode of attendance or local weightings are intended to reflect central costs or to provide a policy steer. ALBSU acknowledges that authorities may wish to give **policy steers** in order to improve the availability and coherence of basic skills tuition. We do not believe however, that weighting by mode of attendance or by level of work is appropriate or in the interest of high

quality basic skills work. It may be desirable, therefore, for LEAs to attempt to establish the real cost of providing high quality basic skills tuition. In attempting such an estimate authorities may wish to keep in mind:—

(a) The need for sufficient organising staff for basic skills provision (the Unit suggests one full-time organiser or equivalent to every 70,000-90,000 adults in an LEAs area).

(b) The higher costs involved in organising basic skills provision including low teacher/student ratios, outreach work, initial assessment and counselling, the preparation of learning materials and the support of part-time staff and volunteers.

(c) The materials intensive nature of basic skills work (ALBSU recommends that £7-£10 per annum, per student should be allocated for the purchase of learning materials).

(d) The need to provide greater staff support for college of further education students receiving basic skills support as part of other courses and to take account of this in the staffing of courses. (Items 30, 31 and 32).

- 5.16 DES Circular 8/88 provides guidance on the Government of Maintained Further and Higher Education Colleges and includes advice on the composition of **governing bodies**. The Unit believes that it is desirable for at least one governor to be asked to take an interest in, and play a lead role in, the development of basic skills work in the college. Whilst it is for governing bodies to determine who amongst their number this should be, clearly, in some areas, it may be appropriate for a governor from the business community to undertake this role. For its part, ALBSU is considering the possibility

of providing some familiarisation training for governors who wish to take a lead role on basic skills matters. (Paragraphs 17 and 23).

- 5.17 Finally ALBSU believes that the location and premises use for basic skills tuition need to be as diverse as possible. For example, some potential students have very negative feelings about schools and are unlikely to be attracted to learning opportunities provided in school buildings. On the other hand, schools have resources and accommodation which can be ideally suited to basic skills work; moreover, experience indicates that some adults do not connect negative learning experience at school with attendance at basic skills groups in **school premises**. The need for diversity means that it is particularly important to ensure that accommodation currently available to LEA's for basic skills work remains available after the Education Act has come into effect. It is perhaps even more essential that ESOL opportunities can continue to be based very locally, in locations, such as schools, where potential students meet. The Act recognises two circumstances, where adult provision is made on school premises either where a school is a 'community school' or where an activity is carried out at a school which might be chargeable.

- 5.18 For the purpose of the Act, a school is a community school if:
- (a) activities other than school activities are carried on at the school premises; and
 - (b) all non-school activities which are carried on are under the management or control of the governing body of the school.

The Guidance issued by the DES (Circular 7/88) suggests that LEA's will be free to pass on earmarked funds for central spending to schools as they do now, and that this may apply in the case of any mandatory or discretionary excepted items that the LEA considers appropriate. Funds passed to community schools in this way will not form part of the delegated schools budget, and governing bodies will not be able to redeploy such funds to their own priorities.

- 5.19 In the case of school premises used by adult or further education institutions, or directly by the LEA, for basic skills work, practice varies between LEAs as to how the costs involved are accounted for. ALBSU believes that, in the main, those costs should be included as a specified part of the basic skills budget, rather than allocated to individual schools as part of schemes of financial delegation.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 ALBSU believes that the Education Reform Act provides an opportunity for LEAs to strengthen and improve the coherence of adult literacy and basic skills and ESOL provision in their area. Moreover, the role of the LEA in strategic planning, target setting, co-ordination and the monitoring of the adequacy of the provision available will be crucial if a high quality service is to be maintained and developed.
- 6.2 In order to assist LEA's in these important tasks, the Unit is expanding its existing consultancy and advisory service to offer individual guidance to authorities, free of charge, on the most effective way of developing basic skills provision in the light of the Education Reform Act.
- 6.3 In addition, ALBSU is planning the publication of further good practice discussion documents for the attention of authorities. The first of these will be concerned with the evaluation of effectiveness of basic skills provision made by authorities and is due to be published in the Spring of 1989.